

Baker 2010 June 4-5th Steve Marquis, Suzanne Bateman, Paul Bateman

We started our day early enough but when Suzanne Bateman, her son Paul and I arrived at the ranger station to register our climb we discovered I had brought out little team to the wrong trailhead! Jordon and I had used this portal when we climbed Mt Buckner and somehow I mixed it up. Well that mistake shaved an hour or two off my margins for the trip so now we were really booking up the sometimes rough dirt road to the correct trailhead.

I think we arrived about 2pm or so and with some dismay looked on to a totally flat rear tire. "Dang!" We must have hit a sharp edge as we blasting up the pot holed forest service road. But now, getting a lot of steep mountain below us was paramount as the day was long and the trail looming even longer - a bit of drizzle did not help anything either. With only 3 of us (Jayson Smith had to drop out) I had purchased a new 1- man tent for myself. Suzanne and Paul would share a two man. I was counting ounces at this point and eyed the new load warily.

With cold muscles the 50+ LBS pack felt like lead bricks but thankfully the 1st few hundred feed were down hill and that helped warm the muscles up a smidge. At the bottom of this last little bit of downhill we would see on this trip, we crossed a cool 1-rail mountain bridge spanning a large chugging creek and then began the ascent in earnest.

After an hour of grinding up the trail we stopped for a few moments for a snack. Paul popped out his Mr. Cool sun glasses and I made some crack that they didn't look dark enough and then it dawned on me that I had failed to transfer my own Mr. Cool sun glasses to my pack "aaaarg." That is a total show stopper and I beat myself up a bit. The good news was that both of the Batemans recalled seeing them in the car. There was no way around it. The glasses had to be retrieved. To my surprise, not quite 14 year old Paul volunteered to run back and retrieve them. It was not ideal but with my heavier boots, marginal joints and 40 more years on me, "running" back was just not possible. I accepted his offer and as he trotted off I remarked to Suzanne that he was growing up to a fine young man to reach outside of himself like that.

Suzanne and I then began the task of shuttling the 3 packs up the steep switchbacks. We thought of carrying the 3rd pack like a stretcher but 75 lbs combined was just too much so we each took turns going back for the 3rd pack every couple of switchbacks - making sure we always moved Paul's pack up the grade 1st! We laughed a bit as to what Paul would think if he found as a reward for his effort his pack left behind and us out of sight up the trail.



With this effort, we continued to make precious progress against the mountain despite the setbacks. A good hour - maybe two later, Paul showed up. He was pleased to see the loads much farther up the mountain and in particular that his pack was not left behind! We all laughed as we imagined out loud a miffed Paul playing catch-up.



Despite this setback, we had made enough progress that in only a few more minutes we broke out of the trees and beheld the mastiff looming across and above the Colman glacier. We could see now two other good sized groups working their way up the steep snow field directly above us so as to avoid the heavy crevasses areas to the left. However, as the afternoon drew longer shadows, the weather began to rapidly closing in on us. We knew it was only an hour or less before we would be enveloped in clouds and bitter cold. I allowed Paul to be our sharp eyes and take the lead following the wands placed by an

advanced party.

We climbed straight up the steep in snow with snowshoes later switching to crampons. We tried to follow the flags left by previous climbers but they often disappeared in the gathering clouds. The heavy blanket of white closed down so tightly that we were hard pressed to see the next flag let alone the advance group well above us. Occasionally the clouds would thin and we could see that we were actually gaining on the other party. We were pushing ourselves hard to beat the pending dark so that was encouraging. Paul's young eyes served well each time finding the next flag out of the fuzzy gloom just in time to keep us confidently advancing.



After the initial straight up ascent, the route angles a bit to the left towards the peak and becomes exposed to the full elements. Wind took advantage picking up stiffly and buffeted us. Deeper snow sapped our strength on each step, often plunging us to our knees and sometime thighs. We switched out from crampons back to snowshoes as the terrain demanded and finally back to crampons. It was now so cold that Paul was having trouble securing his straps and I and Suzanne worked to secure them. I could now see a brief window upwards as the angle cranked up to maybe 50 degrees revealing that we were closing in on the team above us. They were all roped up. From previous climbs, I knew there were no crevasses but given the angle it seemed prudent and so I broke out the rope to the protest of our youngest mountaineer who was now very fatigued.

Even Suzanne, the most stoic individual I have climbed with seemed spent and rushed. Her hands handle the cold better than most and she worked with me to get Paul ready for what I hoped would be the last push to high camp. It was getting towards dusk and the gloom, wind, cold, troublesome foot gear and the sheer unrelenting ardor were not helping the team's spirits. By my best visual reckoning I was

certain that we must be high enough to where high camp was, but in the clouds the flatter section was not to be seen. The team above continued to push on so we followed.

Finally we doglegged left near the cliffs. Suzanne and Paul were both post-holeing and lunging through the sometimes waste deep fluff, then a step of solid and then collapsing again. Suzanne's crampon had failed before and now it 'torqued' off gain. Faltering under the 50+ lbs of gear, I could hear her cry out in frustration and almost end point exhaustion. I had to find a camp place soon and once again asked God for guidance.

"One last rise I promised my intrepid friends, "almost there! Stay in my footsteps!" We traversed now gaining only a little elevation and then most remarkably and quite suddenly the clouds parted and shrank away revealing a broad but now modestly angled plane. This would be camp I declared and my compadres rejoiced. Like a miracle, within 15 minutes all clouds vanished and a broad expanse of distant city lights presented for our view. "Stunning!"



We used our Ice axes to cut out a flat platform in the angled snow and I marked off a safe perimeter with our snow shoes as pickets. There was no minimizing this effort. It was hugely tough and 13 year old Paul was totally and understandably spent. Still I pushed him a bit further, "Dig deep Paul, You can do it! Let's get these tents up." This was one of those Rite of Passage moments and I wanted him to see it as such. That moment where man behavior is demanded of a youth. I don't think what or perhaps how I said it was too well appreciated at that moment, but I will say that my estimation of this

remarkable young man grew one more step as he buckled down past head, stomach aches and bone wracking fatigue to do his part.

At last with waning dusk and still air, with gratitude towards God we ate our evening fare and settled in for a much overdue rest. Paul was so bound up that he was unable to eat much at all and just fell to well deserved slumber in his Mom's tent.

We were well high on the mountain and the need for recuperation acute so I allowed for a late start and just let the early morning sun wake us up.





Even early, the snow was a brilliant, diamond coated carpet rolling towards the summit block. The Roman wall loomed before us and we wasted little time downing a quick cold breakfast and secured gear for the ascent. The whole garb with ropes and harnesses and crampons and snow pants and long underwear, gaiters and on and on can really be rather cumbersome and then you put on the 15-20 lbs of backpack containing emergency gear, water and rations for the day+ and you'd swear that day 2 is not much lighter than day 1. It's hardly true with no tent, bag and other gear left

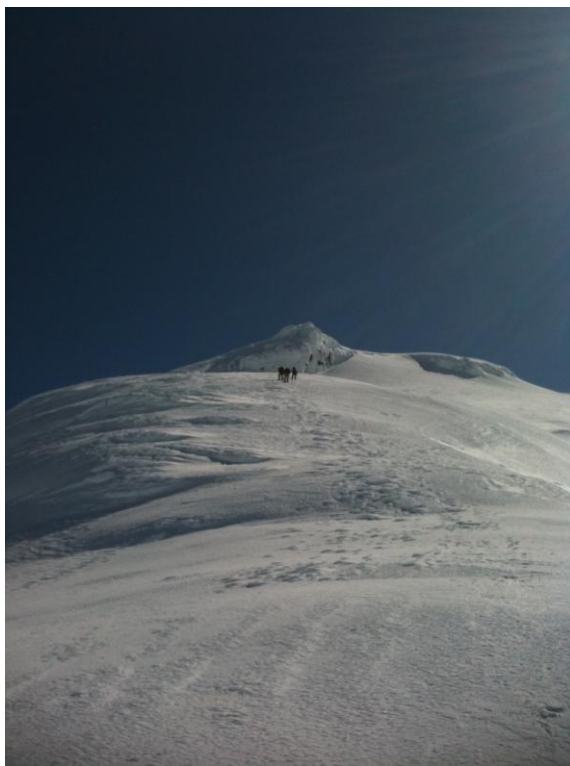
behind, but maybe it's just the residual fatigue of our only modestly prepared bodies. Despite prep hikes, truth be told, I for one am still just a desk jockey with high ambitions for my "city-boy" body. Still the sheer majesty (and luck) of a placid blue sky back-dropping our goal was inspiring as we set off. We mostly followed a single track of foot prints leading to that other group's camp and then we angle off and pressed straight up towards the bergschrund, that massive chasm separating the glacier from the summit block.

Steps were slow and down below us we could see one of what would be several small



teams of skiers gaining ground on our steady but labored pace. We crossed the 'schrund easily this time since half of it was heavily covered from the long winter season and we had but few crevasse dangers to circumvent before arriving at the saddle/base of the Roman wall.

Actually there is a long "hog-back" ridge to be gained before the proper rise of the Roman wall. The ridge itself was probably 500 feet and the nice snow we had "enjoyed" the day before was now frozen and crusty making kick steps tough but mandatory. I plunged twice my ice axe to break the crust and provide an anchor. My team was small and marginally experienced



and I could afford no mistakes on this slicker crusty surface. I tied my ice-axe to my harness and in this manner I provided a belay for the team every other step the entire 1000 feet or so. The Hogback and Roman wall just gets steeper and steeper with a few sections toward the end that seem a good 55 degrees .

There is but 1 rest spot between the hogback and the wall for practically no mental nor physical relief



and it takes a couple of unforgiving hours of focus. "Next step, next step. I can make that next roll off. Now the next." I felt some pangs of envy as spectacularly fit young skiers made faster progress and passed us up. I reminded my 50+ ego that my challenge was within. "Me against the mountain – not the bucks."

Rest steps and steady rhythm gain the mountain and that monotony finally gave way to altitude and then the final steep

pitch to the top. My legs were almost rubber by the time the crest came in view. While practically flat by comparison, my rubber legs now stiffened and feigned to be wooden stumps begging to be planted and left alone, not dragged behind indomitable determination towards the summit knoll.

The determination won and our little pack trekked across the football stadium sized crater to the true summit. Some kind skiers took our summit pictures, but somehow the only picture of me on this mountain was lost. At this altitude and total exposure the wind was so



blustery that downing our lunches seemed more chore than pleasure. We all agreed to retreat before we froze.



Nearing the wall, we roped up again and I placed Suzanne in the lead position to pick the down route with myself as anchor above. I think this was a bit challenging as the plunge steps were flat out difficult; more like chip steps! A couple of times each one of us took our turn sliding a few steps and dove to the protection of our ice



axes. More late comers clogged the narrow route and we weaved a path down around them. To the right and left of the wall is fantastically steep terrain of just cliff so the effect is expansive views “sheer” splendor. As we got down lower Paul began to beg to just glissade the final part of the hogback. It seemed so inviting as the afternoon sun had softened much of the crust, but I pointed out “not all” and that “mostly melted” meant “partly cheese grater!” Still he begged until we found a suitable spot with good run out. Still roped in echelon formation, we all scooted off

the perch in a raucous butt-glissade to the saddle. Now in softer snow we looked for every opportunity to slide. There’s really not much about mountain climbing that classifies as fun , but this definitely does and we all whooped it up like school boys and girls- especially Paul.

The sun shown brilliantly now on the tremendous chasm of the Schrund and I arm twisted my companions who just wanted desperately to go straight down to traverse near enough to it to really look in and appreciate its immensity. From there we slid down again and again passing huge ice blocks that had just this day slid down in mini-avalanches. We no longer really needed the rope, but no-one was interested in doing anything but plodding on across the



final traverse to camp even though it dragged a bit between us.



We passed an upwards bound team who, spotting us came over and asked if we had two tents; a 1 and a 2 man. We did and they informed us that they were seen blowing like tumble weeds down the hill towards the cliffs but a few members of their party had ran, dove and caught them just in time and re-secured them. We were sooo grateful. More of the Lords “tender Mercies” as Susanne likes to say. I agree! He seems to have a way of reminding

us that He is there. I do feel His influence in these extremities. We profusely thanked our Good Samaritans and after one more slide found what was left of our camp. The two tents were stuffed into

each other looking rather like two mating slugs. Everything was rotor-tilled but we were so grateful that everything was there!

The day was getting long and after a brief snack we broke down the tents and packed for the decent. When we walked it felt like I really had to work at it, but in between the walking was a few thousand feet of sliding and while it wasn't too fast, it was fun and ate the mountain up. At last we arrived again at the tree line and collectively we made good observations that led us back to the trail.



As usual when doing a summit bid and walkout in one day we became bone tired toward the end. It seemed that the last turn of the trail would never come; Paul's rental boots did what all rental boots seem to accomplish – major pain on the decent but his pace was not slackened on that account! Finally towards evening with just a bit of light left we crossed that final log bridge and ascended to the car – Oh yeh , the one with the flat tire!

I jacked it up and then tried to lower the spare but the lead screw was so rusty that each turn seemed like a real workout that could on the next turn strip the head. I silently wondered if the screw might even snap for all the force I had to use. Suzanne mentioned how her Dad always kept a ratchet in the car and yes the bolt is now oiled I do have one there now! Anyway we finally got it replaced and packed away; clothes changed for the trip home I turned the key and” rrrrh- rrrrh” furtive glances were exchanged and then “varoommm.” The engine came to life amidst our cheers. Yeh, new battery now too.

This time we eased down the dirt, pot marked road and before too long we found a restaurant to celebrate with real food. Oh was that good. Suzanne was talking healthy but I convinced her that this was a 10000 calorie day and she could eat anything! It must have been 11 or something when we hit the road. I generally hate driving at night and I was so fatigued that really I was in no shape to drive but fortunately Suzanne seemed up to it. She seems to be able to dig deep and pull on internal reserves as she piloted us the next two hours. I tried to keep her alert with chatter. When we later climbed Rainier, She would return the favor. It had to be at least 1AM or later when we pulled in to Fall City. Another epic journey and an excellent precursor to the upcoming “Big Cahoon”

Steve

